

115.



The happy End of an useful Life.

A
SERMON,

Preach'd in

CRUTCHED-FRYERS,

May the 16th, 1725.

On the Death of

Mr. JOHN MERCER,

Who departed this Life *May* the 7th, in
the forty eighth Year of his Age.

By *W. HARRIS.* *K*

L O N D O N : 120

*Printed for RICHARD FORD, at the Angel
in the Poultry, near Stock's-Market. 1725.*

The happy End of an Affliction

SERMON

Preached in



May the 10th 1727.

On the Death of

Mr. JOHN MERCER

Who expired this 1st May the 10th in
the forty eighth Year of his Age

By W. HARRIS.

LONDON.

Printed by J. BARNARD and J. WARD, at the
New Printing and Stock-Market, 1727.



ACTS xiii. 26.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.



HE words are part of the Apostle's discourse at *Antioch*, and relate to the proof that Jesus is the true *Messiah* promis'd to the fathers, *because God raised him from the dead*: and this was evident in that he was *seen many days of them who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who were his witnesses to the people.* And to this the Apostle applies the expression in the second Psalm; *Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee*; or *declared thee to be my son.* And he was raised from the dead with this peculiar circumstance, *Now no more to return to corruption*; or as he expresses it in another place; *Knowing that Christ*
30.
31.
33.
being

Rom. vi. 9. *being rais'd from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him: as it had in the case of Lazarus, the widow's son, and those who rose out of the grave, at the time of his resurrection:*

Mat. xxvii. 52. *and to this he applies the passage of the prophet, I will give thee the sure mercies of David; i. e. the faithful promises of the Messiah, and of the blessings of his everlasting kingdom, made to David: or it may be understood of Christ the son of David, who is sometimes so represented in the prophetick language. Besides, it was prophecied of him, Thou shalt not suffer thy Holy One to see corruption: he should not continue so long in the grave to see corruption; as he should not return to it again. Now this could not be understood of David, because he fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: and he tells the Jews at another time, The patriarch David is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day: but this was strickly true of Christ, for he whom God raised from the dead, saw no corruption.*

Chap. ii. 29. 37.

The words of the text contain the character and description of a good and useful man, in the person of *David*. In speaking to them I shall consider.

I. The

I. The character of his useful life. *He served his own generation by the will of God.*

II. The account of his happy and comfortable death : *He fell on sleep.*

III. The relation between these two ; or how the one depends upon the other.

IV. I shall apply it.

I. I shall consider the character of his useful life : *He served his own generation by the will of God.* I shall briefly open the several parts.

I. His life is a state of *service*. *David* had the peculiar commendation of being a *man after God's own heart*, i. e. of great sincerity, and entire devotedness to God. He was an active instrument of the glory of God, and zealous in his service. He dispatched the whole business God appointed him to do in his place ; and had it in *his heart to do more* ; for Act. vii. 46. he *desir'd to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob*. 'Tis spoken directly of *David*, Psal. lxxix. 9. tho' ultimately of Christ, *The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up ; and my zeal hath consumed me.* cxix. 39. He was faithful to the interest of God in an exalted station, for many years together, in his main bent

bent and course of life: tho' not without the allay of imperfections and faults; like a flaw in a diamond, or a spot in the body of the sun; yet, with the clearest marks of a sound and deep repentance.

A christian's whole life is a state of service and warfare: we are to work the works of God, and contend with our spiritual enemies. In this respect it resembles the case of the Jews in the opposition they met with in building the walls of the city, after their return from the babylonish captivity: *Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon: for the builders every one had his sword girt by his side, and so built.* The Apostle represents this by an hearty devotedness to Christ, and engagement in his service; *whose I am, and whom I serve:* and makes it the matter of solemn appeal and thanksgiving to God; for *God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son. And I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers, with a pure conscience.* This is made the end of our redemption by Christ, *that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear in righteousness and holiness all our days.* And redeems us from all iniquity— that we should

Neh. ix.
17.

Aët. xxvii.
37.

Rom. i. 9.

2 Tim. i.
3.

Luke i. 74

Titus ii.
24.

should be *zealous of good works*. Our Lord makes it the character of his disciples; *If any man serve me, let him follow me*; and is the ultimate view in all the duties of every relation, that we *serve the Lord Christ*. The Apostle makes it the opposite term of the christians conversion from their gentile state; *How ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God*.

Joh. xii.

26.

Coloss. iii.

24.

1 Theff. i.

9.

There must be the united exercise and force of all our powers in the service of God; and it must be the proper work and business of life. Christianity is not a state of idleness and sloth; of carnal indulgence, and careless neglect: on the contrary, we must not be *slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*; and not *slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promise*. To this purpose 'tis observable, that the word here us'd *ὑπερησας* is a metaphor taken from rowers in a vessel under the direction of a pilot; and denotes hard labour in our proper place. Every one must ply his oar, and keep his rank; we must employ our capacities, and fill up our time with proper instances of service and duty in the several relations of life and circumstances of things in which we are placed.

Rom. xii.

12.

Heb. vi.

12.

2. He serves his *generation*. David was of a publick spirit, and serviceable to others

others as well as to himself. He was useful in every capacity in which he stood, as a ruler and a prophet, to the [church and to the world. 'Tis said of him, that *he fed Israel according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.* The word, we render *generation*, signifies also *age*: he was a blessing to the age or generation in which he lived: the one refers to the people among whom he lived; the other to the period of time in which he lived.

A good man is a publick good, and makes others about him the better for him. He *looks not at his own things*; *μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν σκοπεῖτε*, makes not his own concerns his *scope* and end: but *looks at the things of others*, and *naturally cares for their state.* The Apostle says of himself; *I, tho' I am free from all men, yet have I made myself a servant to all—I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* And again, *I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.* He complied with others weakness and mistakes, and accommodated himself to every circumstance, in all lawful things, in order to the good of others.

He is concern'd to do good to all within his reach, and to make the world the better for him. Our blessed Redeemer
went

Pf. lxxviii.
72.

Philip. ii.
4.
20.
1 Cor. ix.
19.
22.

Rom. i.
14.

went about doing good wherever he came, to the bodies and the souls of men; and the Apostle requires to *do good unto all men, especially to those of the household of faith*. We are not to be consider'd as single, independent, individuals in the creation; as if we were made only for our selves, and unconcern'd with others: but as parts of the whole, and variously related to others, and standing in connexion with the world about us. This must give measures and direction to all our service of others; as it is the reason and ground of it. Some indeed have a larger sphere of activity than others, by a publick character, and a high station, a greater capacity, and a wider influence; but a truly good man will be as useful as he can, and extend his service in proportion to the place he holds, the furniture he possesses, and the opportunities and calls, put into his hands. He lives for others as well as for himself, and is really a blessing to the world about him. * And for this reason the death of a good man is always a publick loss: the world loses a friend and benefactor; and the loss is as general as all the instances of his usefulness and service to it, amounted to.

Uni quippe vacat studijsq; odijsq; carenti,

Humanum lugere genus, ———

——— Patriæq; impendere vitam,

Nec sibi, sed toti genitum se credere mundo.

Lucan. l. 2.

B

3. He

3. He is especially concerned to serve his *own* generation. David *served his own generation*: he was useful to the age and generation in which he lived: and tho' his service and usefulness was not confined to it, but survived his own death, and descended to after ages; his victories, and writings, and preparations for building the temple, had a beneficial influence upon after times; yet that which is particularly remarked to his commendation here, is, that he served *his own generation*. And we are plainly instructed by this example, that a good man must be as serviceable as he can in the generation and age in which he lives. We must *do whatsoever our hands find us to do with all our might; and work the works of him who sent us, while it is day*. We should contribute our best endeavours, and lay out ourselves to the utmost, to make the world and age in which we live the better for us.

Improve your talents and trusts with faithful diligence and wise care, to every purpose of the divine glory, and all the interests of the kingdom of God in the world. Make your own hands and eyes, as much as may be, your executors and overseers; and leave not a needless burden to the uncertain care of those who come after. Men sometimes leave large estates, to charitable uses and public benefactions, when they can enjoy them no longer themselves; and without any proportionable

Portionable improvement of them while they live: the world is more beholding to death, than to them, for all the good they do; and they rather enable others to do good, than do any good themselves. And it sometimes proves accordingly; and is either misapplied and turn'd aside from the purpose design'd; or mismanaged by unfaithfulness and neglect; and it may be, in a course of years, entirely sunk and lost. They are so careful to do good to posterity, that they have no suitable regard to their own generation with which they are more immediately concern'd. They erect stately monuments to perpetuate their memory in after times; and suffer the living *members* of Christ, and the *temples* of the Holy Ghost, to suffer want, and lie in ruins. And tho' I would not discourage any good design for the service of posterity, and readily own the great benefit to the world of some which have been well chosen, and wisely manag'd; and no doubt we should extend our usefulness to as wide a compass, and long duration as we can; yet I fear there is sometimes a mixture of vanity, and pride of fame, when men are careful to do good to those who come after them, to the neglect of their own generation, and without being useful to the present age: as men sometimes starve themselves, and live in the meanest obscurity, to leave enormous estates to prodigal heirs. They *call their* houses, as well as *their* lands,

lands, after their own names ; and posterity approve their saying. But don't we take the work out of the hand of the next generation, who are more immediately concerned to support and serve it, as we are to do our own ? If every man faithfully served his own generation, and did the utmost good he could in the age in which he lived ; there would be the less need to be careful about future generations, and every one would be able, in a great measure, to support it self.

4. This service is measured and determined by the divine will. He served *his own generation by the will of God* : the constructions of the words admit another rendering, i. e. That in his generation he *served the will of God* ; which makes the service to refer directly, not to the generation, but to the will of God ; he served the purposes and designs of the divine will in the generation in which he lived. The reference of the *will of God* to his *falling on sleep* ; i. e. that he fell on sleep by the will of God, has no pretence from the letter of the text, or propriety in the character of *David* ; for that is common to all men, and no mark of peculiar excellence. I shall follow our own rendering, that in all his service of his generation, he was under the direction of the divine will : it may be understood in a double reference.

Ἰδιᾷ γενεᾷ
ὑπηρετήσας
τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ
βελίῃ.

1. To the *disposing* will of God. So *David* served his own generation according to the sovereign pleasure and disposal of his providence, in his high station, and larger sphere; and in the different capacities of a prince and prophet. We must serve our generation according to the will of the sovereign ruler of the world; in such places of abode, and stations of usefulness; in such a condition of life and circumstance of things, as he sees fit; and according to the opportunities afforded, and during the season allotted to us. We must be willing to serve God in his own way, whether it be the way we would chuse or no: if he see fit to call us upon the publick stage, and place us in open view; to engage us in difficult service, and great opposition, as the Apostle *served the Lord with many tears and temptations*: or else to cast our lot in obscurity and mean-ness, and confine us to a private circumstance of life, and narrower sphere of usefulness: if he sees fit to continue us long in exercise and labour, and give us many years of usefulness in the world; or to call us off more early in life, and in the midst of our days; before we have finished our undertakings, or in the eager pursuit of them; our service must be determined by his sovereign will, in the kind, and all the circumstances of it. We must readily comply with our own prayers, when we say, *Thy will be done*; and follow the

Act. xviii.
21.
1 Cor. xvi.
7.
Jam. iv.
15.

the example of our obedient Lord, in every thing which befalls us ; *Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done.* The holy Apostle paid a profound deference to the divine will ; *I will return again to you, if God will ; and, I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.* And he directs the christians in this case ; *for that you ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.*

We should always act under a sense of the divine disposal in the nature of our service, and every circumstance of our case : “ God “ has fixed me here by his providence, and “ called me out to the duty of my place : I “ must not move but by his direction, and “ the signification of his providential will ; “ I must not shift my station, however difficult and uneasy, without a just warrant “ and call,” as a centinel keeps his post, tho’ full of hazard, till he is *relieved*, and regularly discharged. Or else

2. To his directing and *commanding* will, as the rule and measure of our service. It is said here of *David* ; *To whom also God gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, after my own heart, who shall fulfill all my will ;* which is explain’d by *keeping that which the Lord commanded*, in the place referred to by the Apostle. We every where find the marks of his high esteem and delight in the divine law ; and his constant

22.
1 Sam. xiii.
14.

constant regard to it upon all occasions. The revealed will of God is the reason and rule of all our service, and sets the bounds and limits to it. We must *do the will of our heavenly father, and work the works of him who sent us, and walk according to this rule.*

A good man follows the light and direction of the divine word: he consults the *lively oracles*, and makes the *law of God his counsellors*, in all the darkness of his mind, and difficulty of the way. He cheerfully submits to any signification of the divine will wherever he can discern it, and firmly adheres to it, whatsoever difficulty or inconvenience may attend it. 'Tis the sincere sense of his soul as well as his outward profession, *Whatsoever the Lord our God shall say, that will we do; and Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.* I own thy sovereign right to command; and profess sincere subjection to thy will.

II. I am to consider his happy and comfortable *Death*: He *fell on sleep*. The metaphor is often us'd in Scripture to signify the happy death of good men, and I think is never us'd but of them in this sense. So *David* and *Solomon*, *Jehoshaphat* and *Hezekiah*, in the old testament are said to fall on sleep. Our Lord uses it of *Lazarus* in the new; and the Apostle frequently when he is discoursing of the resurrection. Now this must not be understood of the soul; as if that

that fell asleep at our dissolution ; for that is not agreeable to the nature of the soul which is a spiritual intellectual substance ; not capable of being divided into parts ; or being dissolved and corrupted, like gross matter, or bodily substance. Besides, 'tis essentially vital and active : it always acts, and cannot but act, in one kind and way or other. So that to suppose the soul to sleep, or fall into a state of inactivity, is quite opposite to all we know of the nature of the soul, and the most essential properties of it. Nor does it any better agree with the *Scripture*-account of the matter, than with the reason of the thing : For a state of service to our generation is preferable to a state of sleep and inactivity ; and the Apostle could not reasonably desire, upon this supposition, to be *absent from the body*, that he might be *present with the Lord* ; or be in a strait betwixt two, i. e. the *desire to depart and be with Christ*, which was *far better for him* : and the *continuing in the flesh*, which was *more needful for them*. The thing would admit of no competition ; for a life of usefulness to the church of God, and present enjoyment of Christ, was certainly better, than a state of insensibility in the grave. And death would not be, upon this supposition, as 'tis every where represented, a gain and benefit to good men ; but a great disadvantage and loss ; a long interval of darkness and silence ; and

Philip. i.
23.

and an interruption to all the comfortable service and enjoyment of this world. Nor would it suit the description of the heavenly state, of being *this day with Christ in paradise*, and being *present with the Lord*; and of the *spirits of just men* being now *made perfect*; if that refer to the future state.

It can therefore only be understood with respect to the *bodily* life, or separation of soul and body: and so 'tis represented by *falling on sleep*, upon such accounts as these;

1. With respect to the *temper* of their minds, or the ease and calm of spirit with which they die. Death is no more terrible to a good man's mind, who has a clear sense of his own integrity, and of the divine favour, than lying down and taking one's repose; or shutting one's eyes, and going to sleep. The putting off the body is but like putting off one's clothes, or *being unclothed*; and lying down in the grave, like stripping and going to bed. So God said to *Moses*, with an air of familiarity, *Go up into mount Nebo, and die in the mount*: q. d. Go take thy rest, and bid the world good night. The reason is, that death is unstung, and disarmed of all its terrors: The curse is removed by the death of Christ, and good men are deliver'd from the *bondage of fear*. 'Tis a covenant friend, and does them the kindest office, which is the king of terror to other men. They wait the appointed time for their great change, and receive it with welcome and joy.

Deu. xxxii.
49.

2. As 'tis a cessation and *rest* from the labour and toil of the foregoing life. As men rest from their ordinary labour, and forget the cares and sorrow of life, when they lay themselves down to sleep; so a good man, at death, *finishes* his course of service, and has *fought the good fight of faith*: his *warfare is accomplished*, and he is discharged from laborious service, and spiritual conflicts, and all the troubles and difficulty of life. There is an end of every thing which was uneasy to them here; of all the sickness and pains of body, and all the cares and grief of their minds: *There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest: They rest in their grave, they enter into peace; each one walking, or having walked, in his uprightness.* The blessed dead *rest from the labour* of the present state; and in the future, *God will wipe away*

Rev. xxi. 4. *all tears from their eyes; and there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain*: i. e. nothing to disturb their repose, or interrupt their happiness and joy.

3. With respect to their being *awaked*, and raised up at last. They are fallen asleep indeed; but they will awake again, and rise at the general resurrection. The holy

Psal. xvii. 15. *Psalmist says of himself; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness*: and he

xlix. 14. *says of wicked men; Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed upon them:*

the

the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning: i. e. The morning after the night of death. The prophet says, *Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise; awake and sing ye who dwell in the dust.* And more directly, *Many of them who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame, and everlasting contempt.* The prophet speaks in the person of Christ, as a glorious conquerour, *I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death.* So our Lord says of Lazarus; *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may awake him out of sleep*: i. e. raise him from the dead. The Apostle speaking of the resurrection, says, *And they who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him*, i. e. in a glorious manner, and to infinite advantage; as a man rises refreshed after a sound sleep, or in the Psalmist's expression, as the rising sun which *rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.* They will rise with new vigour of nature, and capacities more enlarged and improved: and then the glorified body shall be joined to its soul, and both be completely happy, and never be parted any more.

III. I am to consider the *relation* between these two, and shew how the one depends upon the other; i. e. how a life of useful service is the way to a comfortable death, and will have a blessed end. I shall represent it a little distinctly. C 2 1. 'Tis

Isai. xxvi.

19.

Dani. xii.

2.

Hos. xiii.

14.

Joh. xi.

11.

1 Thes. ii.

14.

1. 'Tis the best evidence of *sincerity* of heart or the truth of our grace. Sincerity is the comprehensive indispensable article of the new covenant; the merciful allowance of the gospel, and lowest condescension of the divine grace, in distinction from legal rigour, or sinless perfection. It runs through all the graces of the christian life, and is the essential *form* of them; 'tis sincere faith, and sincere love, &c. Now sincerity of heart, which is the inward real sense of the mind, and the prevailing bent and bias of it, in its practical choice and determination; is best evidenced by genuine correspondent actings and exercises of it, as every habit and disposition of mind is known by the ordinary course of actions. An active useful life, in an entire devotedness to God, and zeal for doing good; is a surer evidence of an upright mind, and right habit of soul, than the fairest outward profession, or the most rapturous pretensions. This shews the true make and temper of the mind, and expresses the real sense of it. And tho' particular actions of any kind, and upon particular occasions, may proceed from other causes; yet an uniform course of action, is an undeceiving evidence of the make and habit of the mind: for no man dissembles or disguises his *main course*, tho' he may offer violence to nature, and lay a restraint upon himself in particular actions, and for a certain time.

And nothing is so proper, in its own place, to make death comfortable, as the sense of our own integrity: for this carries a clear conviction to our mind of our main state, and delivers us from uneasy fears and doubt, and the darkness and uncertainty which often cloud and perplex it. This plainly shews that we are truly sanctified and renewed; and have that faith which justifies when it *works by love*, and is made *perfect by works*, i. e. entire and compleat in its proper fruits; and that our love is *unfeigned*, and *without dissimulation* when 'tis not in *word or in tongue*, but in *deed and in truth*: as a tree appears to be alive indeed, and in a flourishing state, when 'tis not only covered with blossoms, but laden with ripe fruit. It answers the challenges of our own mind, and the charges of hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, when we have walked uprightly, and been useful in the world. This was the comfort of the Apostle's soul when he had the *sentence of death* in himself; *This is our rejoycing, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*

Jam. ii.
22.1 Joh. iii.
18.2 Cor. i.
9.

— 12.

2. It entitles us to certain *promises* of the covenant. The promise of the gospel is the proper ground of our faith, and spring of our joy, living and dying: and tho' the promises of the new covenant are gracious and free, in opposition

sition to worthiness and desert; for they are all founded in the *blood of Christ*, and are all *yea, and amen in him*; yet they are not promiscuous and common, but limited to a qualified subject. We can lay no claim to the blessings of the promise, but in the way in which it is promised, and upon the gracious terms of it: It would be otherwise a bold and groundless presumption, and prove a false and pernicious hope. Now there are promises made to faithful diligence and active service; and God for Christ's sake, will graciously accept and forgive, and will own and reward a faithful soul, who has laid out himself in the service of Christ, and in doing good. They who improve their talents, and make an answerable increase, will be approved and rewarded at last: *Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*; when the unprofitable servant, the slothful and negligent, will be condemned and punished. The Apostle says, *To them, who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will render eternal life*. We must not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience now inherit the promise. It was not by sloth, but in the way of diligence, and in the exercise of faith and patience, that they came to inherit the promise; and so it must be with us. And again, *Wherefore the rather brethren give diligence*

Rom. ii.
7.

Heb. vi.
11, 12.

2 Pet. i.
10.

diligence— for if you do these things, ye shall never fall; and so an entrance shall be ministred to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom. And, Blessed are they who do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and enter in thro' the gates into the city; i. e. a right by gracious promise.

Rev. xxii,
14.

And it cannot but be an unspeakable comfort to a dying christian to reflect upon the covenant of God, which is *well ordered and sure*, and is *all his salvation and all his desire*. What strong consolations and living supports may be derived in his dying moments, from the consideration of his relation and interest in God? With what peace, and rest, and liberty of mind may he depart, who has the security of an everlasting covenant, and the faithful promise to plead and depend upon? How firm a foundation is this for our faith; what a spring and reason of joy?

3. It will minister comfortable *reflections* to our mind at last. Tho' there is no pretence to desert at the hands of God in a fallen creature, or possibility of obliging the Almighty by our best service; when we have *done all, we are unprofitable servants* in that respect; and have great reason to lament our unworthiness and imperfection, and look to the great atonement for pardon and acceptance; yet, as it is an evidence of our sincerity of heart, and of our interest

in

in the promise; so 'tis a proper matter of thankfulness to God, and comfortable reflection of mind, that we have served our generation, and been useful in life. It will set easy upon our minds, and admit a comfortable review, and yield powerful supports, under all the uneasiness of dissolving nature, and the nearest expectation of our change. We shall be able to look back upon a useful life with this comfortable thought; that we have, in our main course, been well employed, and in some measure answered the ends of life; that we have *done what was our duty to do*, and our governing ends and views were right. The sense of regularity and service of life will naturally excite our thankfulness and praise upon a dying bed; “Blessed be God in the midst of many defects, I have not been wholly useless and insignificant; that the business and design of life has been to please God, and do good; that by the grace of God I have laboured in his service, I hope, with faithfulness, tho’ not more abundantly than many others.” As on the other hand; the remembrance of sloth and neglects, of a careless and disorderly walk, will fill the mind with confusion, and breed the greatest distress.

So we find that holy men have comforted themselves in the troubles of life, and the prospects of death, with reflections upon their past usefulness. When *Hezekiah* was sick

sick unto death, he turned himself to the wall, and said; *I beseech thee O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which was good in thy sight.* His personal integrity, and usefulness in the world, was a cordial to his fainting mind, and a living comfort under the apprehension of death: And he was not comforted by false or mistaken grounds. When *Nehemiah* reflected upon his good government, and reformation of abuses in the jewish church; he says, *Think upon me, O my God, for good, according to all I have done for this purpose.* And again, *Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.* And the holy Psalmist says; *Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity; I have trusted also in the Lord, therefore I shall not slide.* What a comfort must it be to a true believer to close his life with the words of his dying Lord; *I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, O father, glorify thou me?*

4. It is a good reason of our future hopes. A good man may look forward, as well as backward with comfort and peace in a dying hour, from the sense of his usefulness and service of life: for it gives him the prospect of a gracious regard from God,

D

and

2King.xx]
3.Neh. v.
19.

xiii. 22

Psal. xxvii
1.Joh. xvii
4.

and a glorious reward for ever. The reward is indeed *of grace* and *not of debt*, and infinitely beyond the proportion of our service, and all pretence of desert; but we are encouraged to expect the heavenly blessedness, purchased by Christ, and promised in the gospel, after a life of faithful service. So the Apostle, in prospect of his approaching change, when he was *now ready to be offer'd up*, and the *time of his departure was at hand*, says, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, and kept the faith*; I have been faithful to my trust, and diligent in my work; and *henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous judge will give me*. And he says, that they who *do good*, and are *rich in good works*—*lay up in store for themselves, a good foundation against the time to come*, i. e. an evidence of title or ground of hope, *that they may lay hold on eternal life*. And he exhorts the christians, to *shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end*; and *not be slothful but followers*, &c. By a course of diligence we attain a confirmed hope of the future blessedness.

A good man has the prospect of rest and blessedness after all the labour of life, and loss of present good. He is leaving the world indeed, and all the comforts of life; but he is *looking for the blessed hope*; and has

2 Tim. iv.
7.

1 Tim. iv.
18, 19.

Heb. vi.
11.

has a joyful and lively hope of the glory of God, and of the heavenly inheritance. He can have *respect to the recompence of reward*, when the service and sufferings of life are over; and *look to the joy which is set before him*, under all the burdens of dying nature, and the sorrows and mourning of all about him. He sometimes feels his heart spring with joy under the nearer views of the final blessedness, and rejoices with a glorious and unspeakable joy, that his *salvation is nearer than when he first believed*; and his compleat *redemption draweth nigh*. His *heart is glad*, and *his glory rejoiceth*, his *flesh also resteth in hope*: for God will not leave *his soul in hell*, or the grave; but will *shew him the path of life*: in his *presence is fulness of joy*, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. Thus the *righteous hath hope in his death*. I proceed,

Psal. xvi.
latt.

IV. To apply it in some practical remarks.

1. It reproves those who are of an opposite character to this of the text, and *don't* serve their generation: men of a narrow and selfish spirit, who only serve themselves, and *mind their own things*; but not the *things of Christ*, or the *things of others*: who confine their cares within the little circle of their private interests, or their own party; without regarding the welfare of others, and the good of the world about them: as if they were born for themselves, and all the world was made for them; instead of their

being born for the good of others. They *seek great things for themselves*, in a common distress; and are not *grieved for the afflictions of Joseph*. They are satisfied to be safe, whosoever is in danger; and not concerned for the welfare of the church of God, or zealous for its interests and service: they don't *seek the welfare* of the places where they live, or *prefer Jerusalem to their chief joy*. This is directly contrary to the character and manner of a publick spirited and useful man.

And much more are they to be blamed, upon the same ground, who *disserve* their generation, and make the world the worse for them, and do harm to all about them; who by the advantage of superiour wit and power, or reputation and influence, spread the infection of error and vice, and corrupt the principles and manners of men. What have they to answer for, who instead of promoting the publick good, and the interests of religion in the world, instil the principles of *faction* and *infidelity*, to the disturbance of the publick peace, and the weakening the evidence and credit of divine revelation, which is the best rule of our duty, the spring of our comforts, and surest ground of our future hope? 'Tis a melancholy reflection, that so many men of the finest parts and accomplishments, of credit and esteem in the world, and capable of serving the in-
terests

terests of virtue and religion with peculiar advantages, have spent their lives in recommending vice, and putting religion out of countenance. This will be so far from making death comfortable, that it will sit heavy upon an awakened mind, and render death full of terrors. They will have reason to wish they had never been born; or never had such talents and opportunities from God, or credit and regard from men: or that they had been born idiots, and lived all their days in obscurity and contempt.

2. We should be *cautioned* from hence, that under a pretence of serving our generation, we don't *neglect* our own souls and our own affairs. Tho' this don't stand in direct opposition to the character of the text; yet, it makes it inconsistent with other duty. We must not therefore be careful of others good, and neglect our own souls; or be forward and zealous in promoting publick affairs; and in the mean time neglect our own families, and private concerns. We must not be *cumbred with serving* others, and neglect the *one thing needful*; and while we become our *brother's keeper*, forget our selves, and be *keepers of others vineyards*, when our *own vineyard we have not kept*.

Let men begin at home, and lay the foundation right: look to your own souls, and your own affairs, in the first place; for we are to *love our neighbour as ourselves*, not
more

more than ourselves, or above ourselves. See that your own souls are safe, and that you stand upon good terms with God, before you pretend to censure and reform what is amiss in others. Let no regard to the publick good make you neglect the duty of your place, or break in upon retired converses with God, and the daily care of your souls. This would bring a scandal upon our pretences to serve the publick good; and unspeakably prejudice the success of our endeavours. Whereas if we first *take heed to ourselves*, we shall serve our generation with the greater advantage; for we shall act in our proper place, and with greater effect of good.

3. Let me *exhort* every one to serve his generation by the will of God. Let your life be a state of service and doing good: act with faithfulness, and the full force of all your powers, rais'd to the highest pitch, and improved to the best advantage. *Stir up the gift and grace of God which is in you: summon all that is within you: be not slothful, but fervent in spirit: whatsoever you do, do it heartily, and with all your might: Give all diligence.* Let every one be up and doing in his proper place, and suitably employed, as those who are heartily devoted to God, and engaged in his service.

Do all the good you can to others, and don't confine your care to your own souls, and your own affairs; tho' they must not be neglected;

neglected; we must begin there, but we must not end there too. Act always with generous views: extend your regards to all about you: lay it down as a point of duty, and propose it to yourselves as a fixed end, to be doing all the good you can, and be blessings to the world about you: that your age and generation may be some way or other the better for you; and it may never come to be said of you, "He only cumbered the ground, and took up the place of a more useful person; it had been as well for the world if he had never been born, or had any being and standing in it: or never had such capacities of nature, or possessions of life; or had died much sooner than he did; the world sustained no loss by his death." Ask yourselves often, whom have I profited, and who is the better for me? Have I done all I could for others benefit within my reach; according to the compass of my ability, and opportunities of service? Yea, and if you can, extend your usefulness beyond your own generation, and to the utmost length, as well as the greatest numbers. Let following ages reap the fruit of your diligence and care, or of your kindness and bounty to the world.

Particularly, measure all your service by the divine will. Walk and act, not at random, but according to rule; not by your own

own will and humour, or by the will of other men; but according to the will of God. *Prove what is the good and holy and acceptable will of God; search the scriptures* for proper notices of the divine will, where the great lines of duty, as well as of truth, are made plain, that a *wayfaring man shall not err*, and *he who runs may read*. Keep close to your rule, and follow its guidance wherever it leads you. Govern your whole course by the light and direction of it, and yield up every interest and inclination to it. Let a plain declaration of the divine will, in any case, weigh more with you, and weigh down every other consideration. I shall only further add, that as a christian acts from a principle of divine faith in all his service, for he *lives by faith*, and *walks by faith*; so he looks for *acceptance* with God, when he has done all, only *in the beloved*, and through the merit of his blood.

4. Be excited to the service of your generation, by the consideration of your *death*: This is an awful and serious thought, that death will come and we must quickly fall on sleep. We know not how soon it may be, but we know that 'tis very certain, and daily approaching. We have so much the less time to live in this world, by all the time we have already lived in it. Who knows how soon our turn may come, or who among us shall be removed next? We
may

may be seized with a sudden distemper, arrested by death before we are aware; struck off the stage of action at once, and disabled for service for ever. Death, whensoever it comes, puts an end to our state of present service, and all our opportunities and advantages for it. *There is no work in the grave whither thou art going, and the night cometh when no man can work. In the grave there is no remembrance of him.* We are now the *children of the light, and of the day*; let us *not sleep as do others: but watch and be sober.* Fill up the little space of uncertain time with faithful diligence, and proper duty. Put not off the work of life, nor any service to others; because you know not but you may be surprized and prevented: death may stop you short in a full career, and cut you off in the midst of your designs: *His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his dust, in that very day his thoughts perish*: all thoughts of further usefulness in the world. This will make death comfortable whensoever it comes; and afford powerful supports under all the troubles which may attend it. Death will be no surprize to a prepared soul; and will lose its terror to one who is faithful. The sense of his own sincerity of heart, and of his interest in God; the present experience of the divine mercy, and the future hopes of blessedness; will make him easy under all the pressures of sinking nature; and joyful,

Psa. cxlvi.

4.

Heb. x. 35.

Rev. xiv.
33.

in the prospect of eternity. Nothing will set so well upon his mind, or be so *sensible* a relief under the exigence and agonies of his last moments; as a life sincerely devoted to God, and employed for the good of the world. And faithful diligence in doing good will be followed with a *great recompence of reward*; and render the *remaining rest* desirable, as well as death comfortable. 'Tis a dangerous deceit to reckon upon peace in our end, and happiness in heaven; after a course of sin, or slothful neglects: but they who *give diligence*, will be *found of their judge in peace*; and faithfulness in present service, will meet with acceptance and approbation at last. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord*— for they *rest from their labours, and their works follow them*: i. e. The fruit and reward of them. The thoughts of the future blessedness, and final rest, will enlarge their views, and revive their hearts; raise them above the fears of death, and give them the joy of hope. Death will be only a release from a state of misery and imperfection; and an entrance into a state of glorious light and everlasting joy.

I have finished what I designed from the text; and shall proceed to speak of our deceased friend; to whom the words agreed so well in both their parts; as to the usefulness of his life, and the comfort of his death: and neither the long intimacy of acquaintance,

acquaintance, nor great endearments of friendship, shall lead me to say any thing of him, but what I knew to be true ; and believe may be honourable to the divine grace, and exemplary and instructing to others. He was born of parents who were eminently pious and useful, and had the great advantage of religious education and example : but received the first thorough impressions of serious religion in attending the evening lectures of a reverend person in this neighbourhood. He became a member of this church in his early youth, and before his settlement in the world. He began betimes with God, and was in good earnest in religion ; and had that serious sense of God, and zeal for doing good in his younger years, which grew up with him, and was so conspicuous and remarkable in him all his days. He sometimes lamented the eagerness of his youth, in wrangling about difficult speculations with other christians, whom he had reason to believe were sincerely good, and had often a great deal to say for themselves ; but was early cured of the hurtful vanity by his own experience, who found it injurious to his own spirit, and prejudicial to practical godliness and brotherly love. He faithfully followed his own light ; but had a sincere goodwill to those who differed from him, and in proportion to the degrees of goodness, he apprehended in them.

He was a man of the clearest *sincerity*; and in whose *spirit was no guile*. The frankness and openness of his mind, joined with a sweetness and goodness of temper, and mixed with candour and discretion, rendered his conversation exceeding agreeable, and his friendship highly valued. He was naturally active, and had a zeal for doing good: of this, the many persons and families supported and relieved in the difficulties and distresses of life, by his help, and by his influence, are living witnesses. He was always ready to bear a part in any good design; and had an admirable skill in engaging the help of others. I never once found him backward; but have often been afraid to move him upon such occasions. He had found it the way to the divine blessing, and earnestly recommended it to those about him: and contrary to the unaccountable humour which ordinarily prevails, with the increase of wealth; he enlarged his bounty, upon all occasions, in proportion to the increase of his substance. And it was returned back into his own bosom; for God remarkably prospered his diligence and dexterity; and he was as generally esteemed and beloved, as any man of his rank and condition, I have ever known; and his death as generally lamented and laid to heart.

He retained his integrity till he died, and carried a clear and unspotted reputation through the world, in the midst of a great variety

variety of business, and many snares of life. He was under an habitual sense of God, and watchfulness over himself. No man ever more constantly attended the publick worship, in the stated and occasional opportunities. Who ever saw him absent, for many years together, from the house, or the table of the Lord? and his close attention, and serious deportment, were the lively indications of the inward reverence and delight of his soul. He attended the affairs of the church, of which he was several years an officer, with an exact care, and a tender regard to the interests of the poor, and was ever forward to any service in which the welfare of it was concerned. His religion was not confin'd to the publick worship; for he constantly worshiped God in his family; and often instructed and called them to an account; and encouraged and directed them in the ways of God, in his private discourse. He had a great favour of divine things in his own heart; and by the advantage of a faithful memory, was able to repeat the principal parts of the sermons he heard on the Lord's days, to his family. It was very observable, that he was never known, in any hurry of business, to neglect secret duty, and retiring into his closet.

He had a sound understanding and a quick and lively apprehension of mind; and had looked with care as far as his leisure

sure and opportunities allowed, into the
 state of religion in the world, and the
 workings of human nature: The effect
 was an humble modest sense of himself,
 and a love to all whom he judged sincere.
 His mind was entirely delivered from all in-
 temperate zeal for any party or peculiar
 opinion. He firmly adhered to the great
 principles and duties of the christian doc-
 trine; and acted in an entire dependence
 upon the divine grace in all the service he per-
 formed, and expected pardon and acceptance
 only thro' Christ. He was remarkably just and
 inoffensive in his tongue and behaviour to-
 wards other men; for he was a *lover of*
good men, and a friend of mankind. He
 detested a rash and censorious humour, and
 setting in judgment upon the hearts and
 the states of other men: he would no more
 have slander'd a fellow-christian, than he
 would have cheated and oppressed him.
 How faithful and tender he was in every
 relation in which he stood, as a child and
 a brother; as a husband and father; as a
 christian and a friend, is well known to all
 who knew him, and had the advantage of
 any relation to him.

He was seiz'd with a violent disorder
 which quickly run to a great height, and
 carried him off in a few days. He told me
 when I first saw him, that he blessed God
 he had made it the business of his life to
 please

please him; and that he was not afraid to die, and had no concern upon that account: he only feared impatience of spirit under his restless disorders. When he once apprehended himself in the agonies of death, he expressed an unshaken satisfaction of mind, and a triumphant joy; "That if it pleased God he might have his own choice, he would not return back to this world upon any account; and tho' his wife and children were very dear to him, yet being with Christ was *far better*; and that he now saw an interest in him was more valuable than ten thousand worlds." And when his friends desir'd him to forbear speaking, for fear of heightening his distemper, he said, "What, must I hold my peace when God has been so gracious to me, and manifested himself in such a manner? I am full of the manifestations of his love, and must I be silent? I know not how long Satan may be chained up." And when he attempted to speak something to every one about him, and was press'd to silence, he said! "Then a full vessel must be pent up; but I leave you all with God." He departed in silent slumbers, and after he had *served his generation, fell on sleep*. He lived usefully, and died in peace; and has left us who remain a great example of activity and zeal in the service of God; and a lively in-
stance

stance of the comforts and hope of the christian life. And may we all shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; and be followers of them, who thro' faith and patience do now inherit the promise,



F I N I S.



E R R A T A.

PAGE 4. line 25. read *strictly*. p. 6. l. penult. r. *He re-*
deems. p. 7. l. 4. r. *'tis*. p. 12. l. 15. r. *construction*.



the
the
ope
em,
erit



He re,
tion.